

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Overview

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* added a new reading initiative to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*—the Early Reading First program. It addresses the concern that many children enter kindergarten without the necessary literacy foundation to enable them to succeed in school. In fall 2009, the United States Department of Education awarded an Early Reading First grant to the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) to implement the *Montana Partnership for Early Literacy* (MTPEL). OPI planned on implementing MTPEL in 23 classrooms, located in five sites throughout Montana, from January 2010 through May 2012. MTPEL has four goals:

1. All participating children will graduate with high achievement levels in language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, and classroom skills necessary to participate effectively in elementary school and to become proficient at reading.
2. All classrooms will contain the materials (instructional, play) and spatial arrangements (e.g., centers) that will support the development of children's language and early literacy skills.
3. All teachers will achieve high levels of instructional proficiency with research-based practices through timely, targeted, sustained, and intensive professional development on children's acquisition and use of language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print awareness. Teachers' instructional proficiencies are applied both to (1) children making satisfactory progress, and (2) children for whom progress monitoring identifies the need for intervention in a Response to Intervention (RTI) process.
4. All children and families will transition successfully into K-3 programs aligned with scientifically based reading research (SBRR).

To attain these goals, MTPEL combines two SBRR programs—*Opening the World of Learning* (OWL) and *Language for Learning* (LFL). These two curriculums form the core reading program (Tier 1) in which all children participate. Based on a RTI model, children not performing at anticipated levels receive additional supports in Tier 2 or Tier 3.

The RTI model is supported by the administration, analysis, interpretation, and use of data from a variety of screening, progress-monitoring, and outcome assessments, including the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 4* (PPVT), *Test of Preschool Early Language* (TOPEL), *Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening* (PALS), and *Get it, Got it, Go!* Additional data on the classroom environment and instruction are gathered from the administration of the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation* (ELLCO) and the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS).

In conjunction with a comprehensive educational program in the classroom, additional programming is available to increase MTPEL children's preparedness for reading and kindergarten. Family members are invited to participate in parent literacy events that aim to improve parents' ability to communicate with their children, build language, and support their children at home. In addition, MTPEL works through the preschool centers to strengthen activities around the transition of children to kindergarten, and with the local education agencies to ensure alignment exists between the preschool and kindergarten curriculums.

Attention is also focused on improving the English language acquisition of MTPEL's English language learners (ELLs) who are primarily members of American Indian tribes and who attend school in an area on or near an American Indian reservation. In addition to participating in instruction in a culturally responsive classroom, MTPEL staff members are trained in *Structured English Immersion*, a program that incorporates principles of *Specifically Designed Academic Instruction in English*. A second population targeted in the grant is special needs children; implementation of the RTI model addresses this focus.

MTPEL provides an array of professional development opportunities—including summer and winter institutes, site-based training, coaching, professional learning communities, undergraduate/graduate coursework, and portfolio development—to MTPEL teachers, coaches, center directors, teacher assistants (TAs), and parents.

In fall 2009, 2010, and 2011, OPI contracted with Education Northwest to provide a comprehensive evaluation of MTPEL. The evaluation addresses the extent to which implementation of its Early Reading First grant enabled the program to meet its goals. The evaluation relies on a mix of methodologies to answer the evaluation questions. These include the analysis of child assessment and classroom observation data, classroom observations, the administration of surveys and staff member interviews, and document review.

## **2011–2012 Participation**

From fall 2011, and continuing through spring 2012, 62 teachers, TAs, coaches, and center directors participated in MTPEL, across five sites and 24 classrooms. These center staff members interacted with 466 children enrolled in MTPEL classrooms from September 2011 through June 2012. The majority of these children will attend kindergarten in fall 2012 (67%); about two-fifths of the children were American Indian (42%) and 12 percent received special education services. About three-quarters of the children (n=361) were identified as participating continuously from September through May/June.

## **To What Extent Did MTPEL Accomplish Its Goals?**

The following summarizes achievements in grant implementation from winter 2010 to spring 2012.

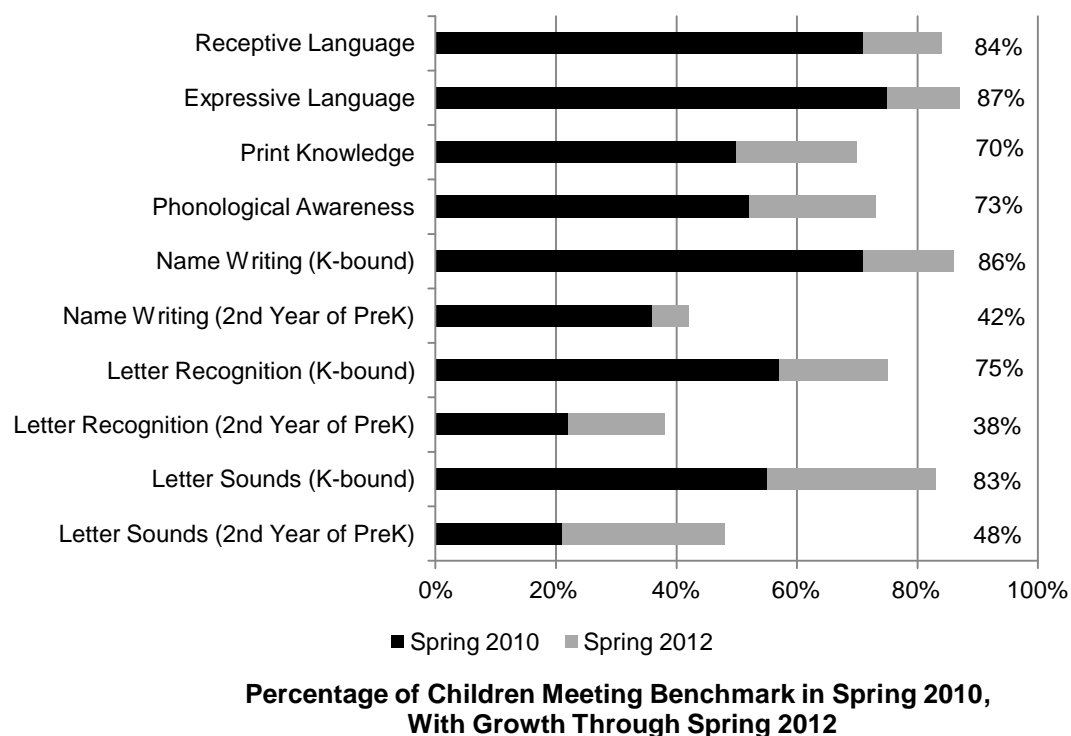
**All participating children will graduate with high achievement levels in language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, and classroom skills necessary to participate effectively in elementary school and to become proficient at reading.**

Analyses of spring 2012 PPVT, PALS, and TOPEL child assessment data showed that the majority of children age-eligible to attend kindergarten in *fall 2012* met benchmark in the areas of expressive language (89%), receptive language (86%), name-writing ability (86%), knowledge of letter sounds (83%), print knowledge (75%), upper-case letter recognition (75%), and phonological awareness (74%). Children age-eligible to attend kindergarten in *fall 2013* had more variable progress on the standardized assessments (PPVT and TOPEL). While the majority of these children met benchmark in the areas of receptive and expressive language (81% and 82%, respectively), fewer were doing so in the areas of phonological awareness (70%) and print knowledge (56%).

Changes in the percentages of children attaining benchmark from fall to spring were significant in all years and all assessments, except in Year 1 (winter 2010 to spring 2010) in the receptive language (PPVT)

skills of children age-eligible to attend kindergarten in fall 2010 and the letter sound (PALS) skills of children age-eligible to attend a second year of preschool in fall 2010. Furthermore, using spring 2010 as baseline, after two full years of professional development and coaching, significantly larger proportions of children achieved benchmark on assessments by spring 2012 (with the exception of the name writing skills of children age-eligible to attend a second year of preschool in the upcoming fall).

**Figure ES-1**



Teachers are applying their instructional proficiencies for the benefit of both children making satisfactory progress, and children for whom progress monitoring identifies the need for intervention in a RTI process. Teachers are also differentiating instruction to meet the needs of children of different ages and ability, and, to some extent, race.

Every year, teachers and coaches reported an appreciation for the professional development and support they received for implementing the curriculums to support Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 children in their classrooms. They reported that this professional development increased their skills, and allowed them to apply their instructional proficiencies to children—both those making satisfactory progress and those struggling to do so. In 2011–2012, the majority of children at benchmark in fall 2011 remained at benchmark through spring 2012 on oral language and print knowledge measures. During this time, MTPEL teachers moved the majority of children, who were below benchmark in their name writing ability and alphabet and letter sounds knowledge, to benchmark. Less than one-quarter of children not at benchmark in early literacy skills in fall 2011 remained below benchmark in these skills in spring 2012.

Changes in the percentages of children at benchmark over time indicated that in the second year of grant implementation (2010–2011), teachers focused more attention on children who were age-eligible to attend kindergarten that fall; but in the third year (2011–2012), teachers focused their attention on both groups of children—those age-eligible to attend kindergarten in the fall and those age-eligible to return for a second

year of preschool. Larger proportions of children, who were age-eligible to attend kindergarten, were at benchmark on assessments in spring 2011 than in spring 2010; but larger proportions of children, age-eligible to attend a second year of preschool, were at benchmark on assessments in spring 2010 than in spring 2011. By spring 2012, on the vast majority of assessments, the largest proportions of children, both age-eligible to attend kindergarten in fall 2012 and in fall 2013, were at benchmark, compared to the proportions of these children who were at benchmark in spring 2010 and spring 2011.

Finally, during the third year of grant implementation, the RTI process intended to close the achievement gaps between white and American Indian children, and between children not receiving and receiving special education services, had mixed effects. Achievement gap analyses indicated that the RTI process was more effective for children receiving special education services than it was for American Indian children. For both groups of children, the achievement gap closed or shrank in oral language skills. Between children eligible to receive special education services and their peers who were not eligible to do so, the achievement gap also closed or shrank in name writing and phonological awareness. However, in the case of American Indian and white children, the achievement gap increased in name writing and phonological awareness, as well as in letter sounds, print knowledge, and upper-case alphabet recognition. The achievement gap also increased between children eligible to receive special education services and their peers who did not receive these services in print knowledge and upper-case alphabet recognition.

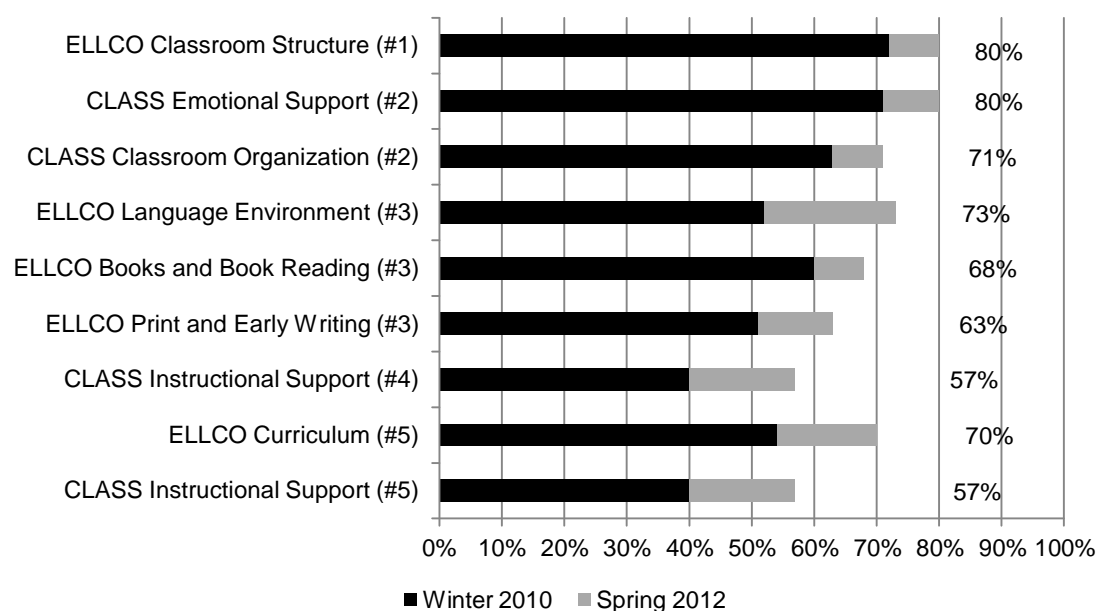
**All classrooms will contain the materials (instructional, play) and spatial arrangements (e.g., centers) that will support the development of children’s language and early literacy skills and all teachers will achieve high levels of instructional proficiency with research-based practices.**

MTPEL made progress in improving teacher practice by helping participating teachers incorporate six standards of effective teaching practice into their teaching repertoire. Analyses of ELLCO and CLASS observation data (data used to evaluate growth in these areas) showed that from winter 2010 to spring 2012, growth occurred in five areas, with exceptional growth in the last three.

1. Teachers are establishing rich and engaging physical learning environments (ELLCO Classroom Structure).
2. Teachers are supporting children’s abilities to attend to instruction, persist with difficult tasks, cooperate with peers and adults, and use language to solve problems (CLASS Emotional Support and Classroom Organization).
3. Teachers are supporting the development of young children’s language and early literacy skills throughout the day, using intentional, playful, and engaging instruction (ELLCO Language Environment, Books and Book Reading, and Print and Early Writing).
4. Teachers are supporting the development of young children’s higher order thinking skills, understanding of the world, and the way things work (CLASS Instructional Support).
5. Teachers are creating environments and differentiated instructional opportunities that meet the needs of diverse learners (ELLCO Curriculum and CLASS Instructional Support).

This progress is displayed in Figure ES-2, which shows the percentage of the total score attained by the project for each measure in winter 2010 and subsequent gains from winter 2010 to spring 2012. Figure ES-2 displays results from observations conducted by evaluators from Education Northwest.

**Figure ES-2**



**Progress on Attaining Five Standards of Teacher Practice, Changes in ELLCO and CLASS Data**

By spring 2012, all of the classrooms at two sites—Evergreen and Great Falls Public—scored in the highest ranges on the ELLCO and CLASS, the majority of classrooms at the Hardin site scored in the highest ranges on the ELLCO and CLASS, and the majority of classrooms at the Fort Belknap and Great Falls Head Start sites scored in the mid-ranges on the ELLCO and CLASS.

In addition, evidence reported from teachers and coaches indicates that progress was made in these same areas. Teachers reported statistically significant increases in their ability to “instruct children to best prepare them for kindergarten” and to “prepare the classroom environment to engage children in language and literacy activities” before and after their participation in MTPEL. On a scale of “1” to “5” where 1 was “low ability,” teachers rated themselves at “4s,” and coaches rated teachers at “5s,” on average in spring 2012. Teachers indicated their instruction became more developmentally appropriate, intentional, and focused on early literacy skills, while their classroom environments were more literacy-rich and provided multiple opportunities for children to read and write.

The sixth standard—teachers use information and data from a variety of sources to understand children’s instructional needs and to improve teaching and learning for young children—was evaluated by survey and interview data. Teachers reported a statistically significant increase in their “ability to use data to prepare, differentiate, and modify instruction for the children in their classroom” before and after their participation in MTPEL. Teachers indicated their use of data changed in three main ways—they were now using data to identify areas where children needed additional instruction, they were using data to form groups for providing instruction, and they were using data to better plan activities for small groups of children.

Another measure to assess change in teacher knowledge was the Teacher Knowledge Survey. Results from spring 2010 to spring 2011 showed significant growth, but from spring 2011 to spring 2012 these gains were lost. As a result, from spring 2010 to spring 2012, there was, overall, no change (in 2010 the

score was 64% in spring 2012 the score was 63%). At least two factors could have contributed to this: new staff members joined the project every year and their participation in professional development and coaching would be more limited and could have lowered overall results. Second, the tool might not have had the sensitivity to measure the types of changes that were occurring in MTPEL classrooms.

Finally, Early Reading First funds provided SBRR curriculums and supporting materials for implementation in 24 extended-day classrooms as well as for family literacy kits for the families of children receiving instruction in the program.

**All teachers received timely, targeted, sustained, and intensive professional development on children’s acquisition and use of language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print awareness.**

From winter 2010 through August 2012, MTPEL offered professional development content in a variety of areas. These included:

- Curriculum implementation of OWL and LFL and the development of cultural break units
- RTI; and data collection, analysis, and use by teachers to inform instruction and grouping, and by coaches to inform coaching and the development of teacher portfolios
- Phonological and phonemic awareness, oral language and vocabulary development, print awareness, and emergent writing
- Using CLASS and ELLCO data to improve instruction and the classroom environment
- Family literacy
- Kindergarten transition
- Coaching and leadership development
- Sustainability

MTPEL provided a significant amount of professional development through off-site and on-site professional development formats. Teachers participated in summer and winter institutes, and many TAs participated in the summer institutes. Coaches and center directors also participated in these institutes, as well as attending additional meetings in Great Falls geared specifically for them. Over the three years of the grant, participants received at least 600 hours of off-site professional development. In addition, on-site coaching reinforced and supported implementation of the professional development provided off-site. ERF Specialists, consultants, and center coaches worked with teachers and TAs, in and out of their classrooms. In the last year of grant implementation (the only year in which on-site professional development was tracked to allow for summative analyses), teachers received an average of 87 hours of on-site professional development.

Overall, professional development across most formats was well received and considered “helpful,” “very helpful,” or “extremely helpful” by the majority of participants.

**All children and families will transition successfully into K-3 programs aligned with scientifically based reading research (SBRR).**

MTPEL staff members worked with center staff members to support and enhance the family involvement activities already provided at their sites. MTPEL encouraged parents to participate in classroom

activities, field trips, and family literacy events offered during and after the preschool day, and the vast majority of parents completing surveys indicated they did so. Family literacy kits were distributed to support parents in their efforts to teach their children at home. Parent reports also indicated that the kits were well received by parents who used them with their children. Furthermore, parents indicated that they engaged frequently in reading and educational activities with their child at home (between four and five days a week).

In addition to these family literacy events, efforts were made to increase the preschool centers' visibility in the community. Working in conjunction with kindergarten teachers at receiving elementary schools, preschool staff members created "Road Maps" to increase community awareness of kindergarten transition opportunities. Of parents returning completed surveys, the vast majority—99 percent—indicated that they had attended a kindergarten orientation, met their child's kindergarten teacher, or planned to attend a similar event in their community.

During the third year of grant implementation, implementation of the Kindergarten Transition Plan allowed the program to achieve the six factors, identified in the grant from research (Pianta, Rimm-Kauffman, & Cox, 1999), that increase the likelihood of a child having a successful kindergarten transition:

1. Children like school and look forward to going.
2. Children show steady growth in academic skills.
3. Parents and families are involved in their children's education.
4. Kindergarten teachers have developed relationships with parents and family members prior to the start of school.
5. Parents trust teachers to understand their children's needs and they value their efforts to promote their children's education.
6. There are collaborative efforts between schools, parents, community groups and social service organizations.

Finally, kindergarten teachers of a cohort of spring 2011 MTPEL graduates reported that, as incoming kindergartners, about 75 percent of these children were at least adequately prepared in classroom skills, alphabet recognition, and phonological awareness, and that slightly fewer (about two-thirds), were at least adequately prepared in the areas of receptive and expressive language, vocabulary, alphabet sound recognition, and print awareness. Furthermore these teachers reported the use of a variety of SBRR curriculums and the use of multiple assessments to assess and monitor early literacy skills